

14. BLACK TERN *CHLIDONIAS NIGER* (LINN.) IN MYSORE, KARNATAKA:
FIRST RECORD FROM INLAND SOUTHERN INDIA

A Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* in full breeding plumage was observed at Lingambudhi lake (12° 16' N, 76° 37' E) in the outskirts of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 39' E) on April 5, 2002. It was seen in a mixed flock of one Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, 11 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus*, all in breeding plumage, one Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* and four Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda*. The tern was identified by the characteristic black-and-grey plumage; head was pure black and the black colour extended to the nape, neck and belly completely, becoming progressively sooty black from neck to belly, excepting the vent, which was pure white. The bird also had no black on the underwing coverts as is characteristic of the White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, and had completely grey upperwing, underwing, back and tail, of a shade comparatively darker than the Whiskered Terns that were in flight nearby. The Black Tern was noticeably smaller and distinct from the Whiskered Terns which had black caps, red beaks and sooty black bellies. The beak of the Black Tern also differed, it was thinner, longer and somewhat blackish. Observations were made using a pair of 7x35 Naturalist Binoculars and a 15x-45x Spotting Scope.

The Black Tern was seen feeding along with the Whiskered Terns, keeping a low flight over the water and feeding by picking up fish (?) or food material from the water surface, and just below the surface. The Whiskered Terns on the other hand, while indulging in similar food capture, also repeatedly made abrupt turns in flight at the same time spreading out their tail and plunged into the water to capture fish, something that the Black Tern was never observed to do. The Black Tern was observed only on April 5 and subsequent daily visits to the site, especially to obtain photographic evidence, did not yield further sightings. It was

probably a passage migrant along with the Whiskered Terns.

The Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* is a winter vagrant to the Indian subcontinent with only a few records for the entire region. Although Ali and Ripley (1987) record only one old sight record from Delhi (Alexander 1950), there have been regular records of odd birds from Pt. Calimere (Abdulali and Ambedkar 1984, Balachandran 1994, Sangha 1994, also see Balachandran 1995, Menon 1992). I too have seen one individual ringed at the BNHS bird-banding camp held in December 2001. It has also been recorded from Kaliveli tank near Pondicherry (Balachandran 1994), Pulicat lake (Mohapatra and Rao 1994, Sangha 1999) in Andhra Pradesh, India and in Sri Lanka (De Silva *et al.* 1993, Hoffmann 1996).

Although the bird observed was probably a passage migrant and could be clearly discerned in the breeding plumage, it is otherwise difficult to separate *Chlidonias* tern in the field in their non-breeding plumage, especially when a large number of terns are together, despite recent improvements in illustrated field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Kazmierczak 2000). I had an experience in which six White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* were picked out from a huge flock of over 2,500 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus*, all in flight, over the Kunthur lake (12° 07' N, 77° 02' E), a large irrigation tank near Yelandur (12° 03' N, 77° 01' E) in the Chamaraajanagar district of Karnataka in September 1999 (also see notes under White-winged Black Tern in Perennou and Santharam 1990); it was extremely tedious work.

July 29, 2002

S. THEJASWI

639, 'Sibia House', 16th Cross,
'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3rd Stage,
Mysore 570 017, Karnataka, India.
Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

REFERENCES

- ABDULALI, H. & V.C. AMBEDKAR (1984): Occurrence of the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linn.) in India. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 80(3): 640.
- ALEXANDER, H.G. (1950): Possible occurrence of the Black Tern [*Chlidonias niger* (Linn.)] near Delhi. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 49(1): 120-121.
- ALI, S & S.D. RIPLEY (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- BALACHANDRAN, S. (1994): Some interesting bird records from Kaliveli Lake near Pondicherry. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 91(2): 317-318.
- BALACHANDRAN, S. (1995): Comments on the note "Occurrence of the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linnaeus) at Point Calimere" by Vivek Menon. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 91(3): 453-454.
- DE SILVA, R.I., E. PERERA, L. PERERA & K. SAMARASINGHE (1993): Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: a new species for Sri Lanka. *Forktail* 9(December): 153-154.
- GRIMMETT, R., C. INSKIPP & T. INSKIPP (1998): Birds of the Indian subcontinent. Christopher Helm, London, UK.
- HOFFMANN, T.W. (1996): New bird records in Sri Lanka and some connected matters. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 93(3): 382-388.
- KAZMIERCZAK, K. (2000): A Field Guide to the Birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Maldives. Om Book Service, New Delhi.
- MENON, VIVEK. (1992): On the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger niger* (Linn.). *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 89(1): 120.
- MOHAPATRA, K.K. & PRAKASH RAO (1994): Further evidence on the

occurrence of the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linnaeus) on India's eastern coast. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 90(3): 511.
 PERENNOU, C. & V. SANTHARAM (1990): Status of some birds in southeastern India. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 87(2): 306-307.

SANGHA, H.S. (1994): Black Tern at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 34(2): 34.
 SANGHA, H.S. (1999): Records of significance from Pulicat, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 39(2): 36-37.

15. ON THE INSECTIVOROUS DIET OF *COLUMBA LIVIA* GMELIN

Some years ago I was watching House Crows, Koels etc. along with Spotted Owlets (in the bright morning light) eating winged termites, emerging from the ground after a heavy shower of rain. Some Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* also joined the other birds on the ground and started picking up something in their bills. I assumed that they were eating grass seeds or picking up grit. However, recently on June 30, 2002, after it had rained the previous day, I saw, from the verandah of my house, four pigeons avidly eating the winged termites that had emerged from the ground! Dead insects were

picked up and swallowed directly, while those still alive were shaken with a sideways movement of the bill before being gulped down.

I have kept domestic pigeons, and have had opportunities of observing free living *Columba livia*, but never have I seen them eating insects.

August 10, 2002

M.K. HIMMATSINHJI

Jubilee Ground,

Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat, India.

16. EASTERN CALANDRA-LARK *MELANOCORYPHA BIMACULATA* IN MYSORE, KARNATAKA: A NEW RECORD FOR SOUTHERN INDIA

Fourteen Eastern Calandra-Larks *Melanocorypha bimaculata* (Ménétrières 1832) were observed at Lingambudhi lake (12° 16' N, 76° 37' E), in the outskirts of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 39' E), on January 7, 2001. Five birds were observed again at the same site on February 25, 2001. The birds were observed on the north-western end of the lake in c. two acres of mixed grassland close to the lake. They were identified by their larger size (*vis-à-vis* the common and widespread Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*), robust beak, distinct white supercilium, a conspicuous black patch on the side of the chest vs. a small patch, sometimes absent in *Calandrella*, absence of a white trailing edge to the wing in flight vs. its presence in the extralimital European Calandra-Lark, *Melanocorypha calandra*, and a narrow, white terminal band to the tail. In flight, the call heard was similar to that of *Calandrella*, "chirrup". The birds were in company of a large flock of c. 450 Greater Short-toed Larks and they clearly stood out in the group; the Calandra-Larks kept a little away from the other larks in the flock, but moved along with them when they flew, or when feeding in the grasses.

The Eastern Calandra-Lark is a fairly common visitor to Baluchistan, Sind, Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan

and Uttar Pradesh east to about the Jumna river (Ali and Ripley 1987); also termed as "erratic" in recent times (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Specimens collected from Kutch (Himmatsinhji 1960, Ali and Ripley 1987) appear to be the southernmost records hitherto of the species. This sighting is possibly the first from peninsular India, south of the Vindhyas.

The Greater Short-toed Lark on the other hand is a fairly common species in winter around Mysore, usually in small flocks, but occasionally in large aggregations of up to a couple of thousand birds.

July 29, 2002

S. THEJASWI

639, 'Sibia House', 16th Cross,
 'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3rd Stage,
 Mysore 570 017, Karnataka, India.
 Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

A. SHIVAPRAKASH
 # 478, 3rd Cross Road, 8th Main Road,
 'H' Block, Ramakrishna Nagar,
 Mysore 570 022, Karnataka, India.
 Email: adavanne2004@yahoo.com

REFERENCES

- ALI, S. & S.D. RIPLEY (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
 GRIMMETT, R., C. INSKIPP & T. INSKIPP (1998): Birds of the Indian subcontinent. Christopher Helm, London.
 HIMMATSINHJI, M.K. (1960): The Eastern Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*) in Kutch. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 57(2): 408.